

Dear Dr. Movassaghi:

Thank you for the comments presented on your behalf by Mr. Curtis Patterson during the public meetings of the Mississippi River Commission held in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and New Orleans, Louisiana, on April 4 and 6, 2001, respectively. In statements at both meetings, Mr. Patterson relayed certain concerns of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development. Our responses to those concerns are given below.

Funding for Mississippi River and Tributaries Project

The Commission shares your concerns about the need to fund the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) project to its full capability. As you may know, the President's budget submission for Fiscal Year 2002 has a 14 percent reduction of funds for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and does not allow for new-start construction projects. Funds are available only for continuation of ongoing projects.

Deficient Levees and Mitigation Efforts

Levee Items 501, 506, 485, and 489 are essentially complete except for turfing. The Vicksburg District will be monitoring the turfing and gravel on these items this year and should contract requirements be met, the Fifth Louisiana Levee Board will be contacted for final inspection and acceptance. The Vicksburg District plans to award Items 480 and 485 this year. Design is also ongoing on five other items in Madison Parish which could be awarded in Fiscal Year 2002 provided rights-of-way and funding become available.

With regard to mitigation efforts, the Vicksburg District is working to secure 2,600 acres of mitigation land in Catahoula Parish for the Mississippi River Levees project. The District hopes to close on this project in May-June 2001.

Reforestation would then begin this winter. Once reforestation is complete, it is anticipated that this project will be turned over to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife to manage.

Relief Wells for Seepage

The Vicksburg District installed relief wells in five locations in Louisiana, and all sites are working well. The District will continue to evaluate each item where seepage berms are required to determine if relief wells are the best solution.

Bayou Rapides Pumping Plant

We are pleased to report that in December 2000, the Vicksburg District awarded a \$7.7 million contract for replacement of the Bayou Rapides Pumping Plant. In Fiscal Year 2001, \$3.3 million is being used to initiate construction of the replacement structure and continue routine operation and maintenance.

Sicily Island Project

Construction is currently underway on Levee Items 1-C, 1-D, and 2-B of the Sicily Island project. In addition, the Corps received the rights-of-way for the last item of work from the Tensas Basin Levee District in April 2001 for the Billys and Falcon Bayous plugs. The District plans to advertise the construction contract by the end of May 2001. Based on this schedule, completion of the Sicily Island Area project is expected in December 2001.

Ouachita River Bank Stabilization

After many years of working together with your agency, we fully appreciate the need for completion of the Ouachita River Levees, Louisiana, project. The remaining unfunded items of

work include levee enlargement of Items 2 and 3 in the Bastrop to Monroe reach of the east bank levee and resurfacing of the Monroe to Sandy Bayou reach of the east bank levee. These two remaining levee enlargement items are critical to the protection of the Monroe urban area. While no funds are included in the Fiscal

Year 2002 President's budget, the Corps will consider including funds to complete this much needed project in the initial budget request for Fiscal Year 2003. However, the receipt of funds will ultimately be based upon national funding priorities.

As you know, the Corps does not have general authority for bank stabilization on the Ouachita River. The Corps has the authority to study the bank stabilization needs and assess the magnitude of these needs. However, there is insufficient funding for such a study. There will be consideration of including funds to initiate this study in the initial budget request for Fiscal Year 2003. The receipt of funds will ultimately be based upon national funding priorities.

Maritime Transportation

The Corps shares your viewpoint on the importance of our nation's maritime transportation system. Inland navigation continues to be a critical part of our nation's infrastructure and confers wide-ranging benefits on national and state economies. Currently we operate and maintain nine primary navigation locks on the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) and the Morgan City to Port Allen, Louisiana, alternate route. Of the nine locks, Leland Bowman Lock was replaced in 1985, Inner Harbor Navigation Canal Lock is under construction for replacement, Bayou Sorrel Lock is being evaluated for modification or replacement, and Calcasieu Lock is in the feasibility study phase for replacement. The New Orleans District is committed to meeting the growing demand of the maritime transportation system and will continue to assess problematic areas as they develop.

Louisiana State Penitentiary Levee at Angola

We agree that the levee project at the Louisiana State Penitentiary has been very successful and has enjoyed a tremendous amount of cooperation among many groups with diverse interests. On April 26, 2001, the New Orleans District awarded the final levee enlargement contract for the reach from Camp "C" to the main gate. As was mentioned in

your statement, completion of construction is anticipated in Fiscal Year 2003. Sufficient Federal funds are budgeted to support our construction schedule, and the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections has provided the required share of non-Federal funds requested to date.

Lower Atchafalaya Basin Reevaluation Study

The New Orleans District has prepared a preliminary draft report on the Lower Atchafalaya Basin Reevaluation Study that is under review within the Corps of Engineers. This preliminary draft report will be forwarded to the Leadership Group for comment prior to formal submission through the Corps' chain of command. The anticipated circulation of the preliminary draft report is in June 2001. The Corps looks forward to your comments and assistance in this important document.

Morganza to the Gulf of Mexico

The purpose of Morganza to the Gulf study is to determine the feasibility of providing flood protection and enhancement measures in Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes. The proposed plan involves constructing levees with structural features integrated into the design to provide drainage, environmental benefit, and navigational passage. The New Orleans District forwarded a draft feasibility report to the Mississippi Valley Division and Corps Headquarters in August 2000 for policy review. The Chief's report and final feasibility report are scheduled for completion in September 2001. Planning, Engineering and Design (PED) for the Houma Navigation Canal Lock was initiated in Fiscal Year 2000 and is continuing this fiscal year with a scheduled completion date of June 2003. Initiation of PED for the overall project will require the Division Engineer's Notice and additional funding that is expressed as capability in Fiscal Year 2002.

The New Orleans District will initiate a study to investigate the feasibility of deepening the Houma Navigation Canal to -20 feet in response to the Terrebonne Port Commission's request.

The findings of this study will determine the final depth of the lock. PED is proceeding with the lock at the depth of -20 feet.

Donaldsonville to the Gulf of Mexico

The Corps of Engineers is also eager to initiate the Donaldsonville, Louisiana, to the Gulf of Mexico Feasibility Study. Your letter of December 13, 2000, to the New Orleans

District Engineer forwarded the Lafourche Basin Levee District's proposal to perform some work-in-kind services as the non-Federal sponsor's cost-share contribution. A meeting was held on February 1, 2001, among members of New Orleans District, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD), and Lafourche Basin Levee District (LBLD).

The staff of the Louisiana DOTD asserted that they wanted to provide 100 percent (50 percent of the study cost) of their cost share as work-in-kind. DOTD and LBLD also stated that they need to be co-sponsors

for the feasibility study. They requested that New Orleans District revise the Feasibility Cost-Sharing Agreement (FCSA) and Project Study Plan (PSP). A second meeting was held on March 27, 2001, to discuss changes to the FCSA and PSP.

Agree-

ment was reached on the items and cost estimates of the work to be provided as work-in-kind services. However, DOTD's request

to add Article XI, "Obligations of Future Appropriations," is a deviation from the standard FCSA, which will require approval

by the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works). It is anticipated that the FCSA and PSP will be forwarded to the Secretary in June 2001.

Alexandria to the Gulf of Mexico

The New Orleans District is making efforts to conclude negotiations on the feasibility cost-sharing agreement for the first phase of the Alexandria to the Gulf of Mexico Study so the District can execute the agreement and start the study as soon as possible. The first study phase will address flooding problems in the Chatlin Lake Canal watershed in the Alexandria area.

Due to the minimal funding for the reconnaissance phase of the study (\$100,000), the remaining phase (or phases) of the study will begin with reconnaissance-scope analyses of alternatives to determine whether to conduct feasibility-scope studies.

Reconnaissance Studies

The Corps recognizes your concerns about the costs of reconnaissance studies being limited to \$100,000. It is the intent of the Corps to conduct reconnaissance studies in an expedited manner (12-month duration and \$100,000 cost limit), as detailed in Planning Guidance Letter 96-3, Expedited Reconnaissance Study Phase, dated August 16, 1996. The goal of this process is to reduce the overall time of completing a reconnaissance-scope analysis and executing a Feasibility Cost-Sharing Agreement, with a target of 12 months from

initial obligation of funds to a signed FCSA. Many of the tasks traditionally accomplished in the reconnaissance study have been waived, and emphasis has been placed on the essential tasks that are required to (a) demonstrate a Federal interest in conducting a feasibility study and (b) produce a Project Study Plan to support the FCSA. Additionally, the results of these actions have drastically reduced the overall cost to the taxpayer by placing a study cap of \$100,000 on the reconnaissance study. However, the Corps will seek approval for additional funds for selected reconnaissance studies that are for larger complex areas and water resources problems.

Hurricane Protection for Coastal Louisiana

The Corps, in partnership with the State of Louisiana and several levee districts, has either constructed or is constructing over \$1 billion of hurricane protection measures in south Louisiana. Also, several general investigation studies, including the previously mentioned Donaldsonville to the Gulf of Mexico and Morganza to the Gulf of Mexico, under the Flood Control, Mississippi River and Tributaries project, are ongoing. The New Orleans District has recently initiated a reconnaissance study called "Hurricane Protection, Louisiana," to investigate providing protection against category 4 or 5 hurricanes. The District obtained a waiver to allow expenditure of \$500,000 and 18 months for this study. Additionally, six smaller protection projects in the Barataria Basin are being actively pursued under the Corps' Section 205, Continuing Authorities Program.

Thank you again for the participation at our public hearings by members of your staff. We appreciate receiving the views of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Edwin J. Arnold, Jr.
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
President Designee, Mississippi
River Commission